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MEXICAN MAIOLICA

IN THE COLLECTION OF

THE HISPANIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA

BY

EDWIN ATLEE BARBER, PH.D.

Director of the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art
Philadelphia, Pa.

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FOUNTAIN
Made at Puebla, Mexico
Seventeenth Century
(See No. 9, page 29)

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INTRODUCTORY NOTES

MAIOLICA is a soft pottery, of whitish or buff tint, covered with an enamel, or glaze, whose dense white color and great hardness are imparted by a greater or lesser proportion of tin in the composition. Being entirely opaque, the tin or stanniferous enamel will obscure any decoration which may be applied beneath it. The colors must be painted either *over* the enamel, after it has been fixed by the fire, or *in* it, being applied to the dry enamel before firing. After being fused in the kiln, the inglaze designs appear to be incorporated with the enamel. This latter method was the one employed by the Mexican potters.

Maiolica was first introduced into Mexico by Spanish potters from Talavera and Seville, Spain, toward the end of the sixteenth century, and native Mexican potters continued the manufacture from that time down to the present day. So far as we have any knowledge, tin-glazed pottery was produced

at only one place in Mexico, the city of Puebla. Here, during the best period of the art, from about 1650 to 1750, were numerous fabriques where maiolica was produced.

The earliest Mexican maiolica was decorated in dark blue, but at a later period, toward the middle of the seventeenth century, other colors — yellow, green, brown, and black — were introduced. The blue color of Mexican maiolica differs from the Spanish in being thick and viscid, standing out in perceptible relief, instead of being thin and flat without any unevenness of surface. The decorations of the Mexican ware were painted in a vigorous and bold style, quite different from the careful and often delicate treatment of the Spanish maiolists. The ware was usually coarse and heavy, and frequently clumsy in modeling, yet it possessed a quality of manly vigor not found in the more effeminate products of Spain or Italy. The Mexican ware was better suited for architectural embellishment than for household purposes, and was most effective when seen at a distance, as tile work and benitiers on the walls of churches, or as garden fountains, large vases for growing plants, enormous basins built in lavatories for the ablutions of the clergy, and figure finials for the roofs of religious edifices. Yet a great amount

of maiolica was also produced for common use and interior decoration, such as albarellos, or drug jars, inkstands, salt cellars, plates, jugs, jars, vases, cups and saucers, bowls and charcoal burners.

The earliest inspiration for the Mexican maiolists was the blue and white ware of Talavera de la Reyna, Spain, which began to appear in Mexico late in the sixteenth century. The Spanish influence is strongly marked in those pieces in which saints, heads of cherubs, horses and chariots, figures of squirrels, boars, bulls and hares appear among the decorative details, and in many of the forms of vessels, such as the urn-shaped jardinières, the albarelli, or apothecary jars, and the barrel-shaped flower jars, which were borrowed from the Italians by the Spaniards. In the seventeenth century, potters went to Spain from Italy and introduced certain styles of modeling and painting there. It is probable that some of these artisans went from Genoa or Savona, as we can trace a marked resemblance in some of the Talavera and Toledo wares to those of the two Italian cities.

In the painting of the earlier wares, three styles of treatment were practiced by the Pueblan potters:

1st. The Tattooed (Intaglio).
2d. The Silhouetted (Relief).
3d. The Outlined (Surface).

In the Tattooed style of decoration, the ground work and filling of draperies, outlined spaces, etc., are effected by the use of large blue dots or of fern-like fronds composed of dots, which are perceptibly *depressed beneath* the surface. This intaglio effect (most conspicuous in the earlier pieces) was apparently produced by applying the blue pigment to the raw glaze with a blunt or pointless brush or other tool. By pressing the color into the freshly and thickly applied viscous glazing liquid, depressions were formed, the outlines of the designs having previously been lightly traced on the surface in pale blue. This was a primitive and coarse process of stippling or shading, where solid color was not desired. After the glaze and decoration had become thoroughly dry and set, the ware was fired and the sunken dots became permanently fixed.

In the Silhouette method of treatment, the rich, dark blue color was more thickly applied with a pointed and full brush, forming a solid deposit on the surface of the glaze in pronounced relief. There was no attempt at shading or retouching, the pigment being of such consistency that it retained its contour through the heat of the kiln. This style of embossed painting appears to have been almost entirely confined to work executed in the Spanish manner.

The imitation of Chinese painting was usually in flat color. The Oriental blue and white porcelains, which served as models, were painted level with the surface in monochrome or camaieu — in different shades of blue — and when the Mexican artist attempted to reproduce these effects alone, he usually employed a thinner color and applied it lightly and evenly. In consequence of this more delicate mode of treatment, the general effect is lighter in shade than that of the heavy silhouette painting. The outlines of figures were traced in a pale, thin blue and afterwards filled in by one of the previously described methods.

Quoting from the author's work on *The Maiolica of Mexico*:*

"A careful study of the body of Puebla maiolica reveals the fact that the clays employed were apparently of two kinds, white and red. These two varieties will be found to occur in the earliest pieces as well as in those of recent date. The white body is much softer than the red, the difference in color being caused by the degree of heat to which the ware was subjected at the first firing, or the length of time it was allowed to remain in the kiln. When baked

**Art Handbook,* Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, Philadelphia, 1908.

slightly, the clay appears white and porous, and so soft that it can be readily cut with a knife, but when allowed to remain longer in the kiln, at a high temperature, it becomes partially vitrified and considerably harder, and of a deep pink or reddish hue, increasing in density with the darkening of the color. Thus the tint of the body bears no relation to the antiquity of the ware nor does it indicate the locality from which the clay was obtained. It is true that two varieties of clay were used — white clay obtained at San Bartolo, San Pedro and Santo Tomas, hills near the village of Totomehuacán, five kilometers from Puebla, and red clay from Loreto and Guadalupe, in the vicinity of that city, but these are always combined in equal parts, to produce the results desired. It is stated that no other combination of clays is employed and that neither the red nor the white clay can be used alone, with satisfactory results."

The glaze for the finer quality of ware was composed of 24 parts of tin for every 100 parts of lead, while for the ordinary wares the proportion of tin was only about eight per cent.

While the methods of the Talavera potters were reflected in the earlier maiolica wares of Puebla, the influence of the Seville school is seen, to a marked degree, in the polychrome products of the later period

in Mexico, particularly in the painting of tile-work. Francesco Niculoso Pisano, an Italian maiolist, went to Seville about the end of the fifteenth century and established a new school of painting there which was called after him. It is not known where he learned his art in Italy, but he is believed to have studied at Faenza or Caffaggiolo, since his work strongly resembles in technique the painting which originated in those centres. Much of the best tile-work found in the churches of Seville and other places in Spain, belonging to the early part of the sixteenth century, is attributed to him. This style of polychrome painting on large, flat surfaces became at once popular, and his imitators, steadily increasing in numbers, continued to follow the Pisano style through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and about the beginning of the eighteenth century introduced it into Mexico. In many of the churches and other religious foundations of that period in Mexico, the tile-work inserted in the façades and interiors shows the Pisano influence. A marked peculiarity of the Pisano school, both in Spain and in Mexico, is the lavish use of manganese purple, which is rarely seen in Italian maiolica. A painted panel, composed of small tiles (see No. 29), in the collection is of this character.

The Seville influence is also apparent in the maiolica wares of Mexico, particularly in some of the albarellos, or drug jars, which are coated with a heavier and more creamy enamel than those of the Talavera style, in which the enamel is thinner and of a more bluish tint. This difference is noticeable in the household and utilitarian wares produced through the eighteenth century.

The Chinese methods also began to impress themselves upon the maiolica of Mexico fully as early as 1650, at a time when much Oriental porcelain was being imported into that country, and some of the pieces in the collection (see Nos. 10 to 15) are, in their forms and decorative treatment, strongly suggestive of such influence.

"The importation of this ware into Mexico in large quantities naturally stimulated the artistic zeal of the native potters, who soon commenced to imitate the Eastern forms and decorations in their own productions. The spherical jar-shaped vase with bell-shaped cover was extensively copied, and it will be found that the greater number of such pieces are ornamented with characteristic motives and entire designs derived from the Chinese. These jars are made in many sizes, some of which are exceedingly capacious. In the lapse of time, most of the dome-

shaped covers, belonging to the Mexican maiolica, have been broken or lost, so that it is only occasionally that an ancient jar is found with cover intact. Among the Oriental porcelain vases of this form found in Mexico, many were provided with hinged iron lids having a lock and key for the safe keeping of ginger and other confections. Some of the Puebla jars were mounted with metal covers in the same manner, in which chocolate and vanilla could be safely locked. No. 14 is a jar of this character, which, while Chinese in shape, is decorated in Spanish style. The iron collar and lid are purely Oriental."[1]

In summing up the distinguishing features of Mexican maiolica, the writer ventures to quote from an article prepared by himself for another publication:[2]

"The maiolica of Mexico, as we know it today, is a composite ware, the result of a combination of four distinct sources of inspiration. The first Spanish potters brought with them traditions of an older art — the Moresque — which revealed itself in some of their earlier work in New Spain. Among the first products of the Mexican maiolists are pieces which

[1] *The Maiolica of Mexico*, p. 61.
[2] *Art in America*, Vol. III, No. 1.

reveal a marked Moresque or Hispano-Moresque feeling, of which a lavabo, or laver (in the Mrs. Robert W. de Forest Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art), from the lavatory of an ancient convent, is a striking example. The decoration consists of strap-work and loop-work in heavy raised blue enamel, outlined with black. The peculiarity of this bowl is the inscription which extends around the rim: 'Soy para labar los (Sac) ryfycadores y no mas' (I am for washing the sacrificers and for no other purpose). In many of the early churches, convents and monasteries, lavatories, usually furnished with three large basins, were provided for priestly ablutions. A similar, but more elaborately decorated example, from the old convent at Atlixco, is in the Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia.

"The Aztec influence was also apparent in the artistic ambitions of the first Indian pupils of the Spanish potters. When upon these three diverse sources of inspiration the Oriental was grafted, the result, after three centuries of amalgamation, was a Moresque-Hispano-Aztec-Sinico combination of forms and decorations. Two or more of these distinct styles were often combined in a single piece, and at one period, in the seventeenth century, there was frequently an overloading of ornament, in which Chi-

nese, Mexican and Spanish motives were mingled in meaningless confusion. But we also find many fine examples of ware in which the purity of a single style is preserved alone.

"The early Mexican maiolica painter confined his efforts to work of a purely decorative character. His painting, particularly that in blue, was bold and vigorous and occasionally possessed elements of surprising strength and beauty in the arrangement of geometrical and conventional effects. He never aspired to the more ambitious but effeminate *istoriato* style of the Urbino artists. His conceptions were childlike in their simplicity and their execution was often marked by a charmingly naïve crudeness of technique. The vastness of his surroundings, at an altitude of over seven thousand feet, with the wonderful snow-capped volcano of Popocatepetl rising from the plain another ten thousand feet, apparently at his very threshold, undoubtedly exercised a powerful influence in developing a breadth and freedom of treatment in his work, and inspired him to create those enormous fountains, gigantic vessels, and tile patterns covering great mural surfaces in churches and convents, in which the southern part of Mexico abounds. Some of these structures were completely encrusted with glazed tile-work, modeled and painted

in attractive and often intricate designs. Figures of saints in miniature contributed to the striking embellishment of ridge-tiles and parapets, while the façades were frequently covered with painted tile panels of large size. This vigorous fictile ornamentation was well suited to the various styles of architecture which were introduced throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, notably the Mudéjar, the Spanish Renaissance and the Churrigueresque, whose florid exuberance required the touch of color and the intricacy of painted designs to relieve the monotony of the otherwise plain broken surfaces. The interiors of churches, convents, and other religious foundations were likewise embellished with glazed tile-work. Holy-water fonts of elaborate design were set in the walls and huge lavabos were constructed for the ablutions of the clergy. In the surrounding grounds, cisterns were walled in with tile-covered masonry, while great jars and jardinières of painted maiolica were lavishly provided for flowers and growing plants. The output of the maiolica factories was enormous. Articles of all sorts for household use and decoration were turned out in such abundance that the height of manufacture, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, might properly be known as the Maiolica Age.

"As the sacerdotal orders were the principal supporters of the art during their establishment in New Spain, it follows that when the extension of the Church in Mexico was checked and its influence began to decline, the tile industry commenced to languish. The building of ecclesiastical structures practically ceased and the maiolica industry gradually fell into decay.

"Lustering was apparently never attempted by the Mexican maiolists, probably for the reason that the potters who went to Mexico from Spain had learned their art in Talavera and in Seville, where metallic luster painting was never developed to that high degree of perfection which was reached by the Hispano-Moresco ceramists of Malaga and Valencia in Spain, and the artists at Gubbio, and to a lesser extent, perhaps, at Pesaro and Diruta in Italy."

A comparison of the stanniferous faience of Mexico with the Talavera and Seville maiolica, which occupies a neighboring case, will show the close relationship which existed between these manufactures during the seventeenth century, when blue predominated in the ornamentation, which was followed by the introduction of polychrome decoration in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

(See booklet on *Spanish Maiolica.*)

EDWIN ATLEE BARBER

CATALOGUE OF MEXICAN MAIOLICA

1. ALBARELLO

Height, 4¾ inches.

Conventional decoration in heavy raised blue enamel.

Spanish style.

Puebla, Mexico, 1700–1750.

2. ALBARELLO

Height, 5¾ inches.

Painted with band of heavy dark blue at top and bottom, each containing scrolls reserved in the white ground.

Showing Spanish influence.

Puebla, Mexico, 1700–1750. PLATE I

3. ALBARELLO

Height, 9½ inches.

Decorated with vertical bands of vine-work in heavy dark blue.

Spanish style.

Puebla, Mexico, 1700–1750. PLATE II

4. ALBARELLO

Height, 9 inches.

Heavy dark blue ornamentation in bold conventional leaf designs arranged in diagonal panels.

Showing Spanish influence.

Puebla, Mexico, 1700–1750. PLATE II

5. INKSTAND

Diameter, 3¾ inches.

Hexagonal shape, standing on four small feet. A quill hole at each of the six angles. Having dark blue edges and rude floral ornament in each side panel.

Spanish style.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1750. PLATE I

6. JAR

Height, 9½ inches.

Spherical form, with vertical collar. Embellished with diagonal panels, each enclosing a bird, and separated by a bold feather-shaped band. Painted in raised dark blue enamel.

Spanish style.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1700. PLATE III

7. VASE, OR URN (For Growing Plants)

Height, 14¼ inches.

Globular form, with large funnel-shaped top. Crimped edge, and two small serpentine

2. Maiolica Albarello, 1700-1750
5. Maiolica Inkstand, About 1750
Decorated in Dark Blue

4, 3. Maiolica Albarellos
1700-1750
Decorated in Dark Blue

6. Maiolica Jar
About 1700
Decorated in Dark Blue

7. MAIOLICA FLOWER VASE
1700-1750
Decorated in Dark Blue

handles. Floral and leaf design in raised dark blue enamel.

Showing Spanish influence.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1700–1750. PLATE IV

8. LAVER

Diameter, 18¾ inches. Height 4⅝ inches.

Flat base (11¼ inches diameter), outward curving sides. Crimped edge. Conventional decoration in raised dark blue. Boldly painted with rude rock and tree in centre, and strap-work around sides.

Spanish style.

Puebla, Mexico, 1700–1750. PLATE V

9. FOUNTAIN

Diameter, 27 inches.
Height of basin, 6¾ inches.
Height of central pillar and bowl, 15½ inches.

In form of a square, with an arc of a circle springing from each side. Blue decoration of floral and foliated pattern, interspersed with figures of fishes and birds. Around flat top of edge, which is an inch in thickness, is a graceful vine pattern in blue. Rising from the centre of the basin is a hollow pillar supporting a bowl, 10¾ inches in diameter, with lobed sides, painted in panels, each enclosing a floral ornament.

Spanish style.

Puebla, Mexico, 1680–1700. *See Frontispiece.*

10. FLOWER VASE (Barrel Shape)

Height, 16 inches.

Foliated and floral decoration in dark blue, interspersed with human figures, animals and birds outlined in pale blue.

Showing Spanish influence in form and Chinese influence in decoration.

Puebla, Mexico, 1650–1700. PLATE VI

11. VASE

Height, 18½ inches.

Inverted pear shape, short collar, and two rudely modeled serpentine handles. Elaborately decorated with central design on each side in light blue — a woman in a chariot, drawn by two horses, driven by a driver who stands in front. The other spaces are filled with figure subjects — a Spaniard prodding a bull; a man holding two dogs in leash while another man is presenting a rabbit before them; a woman with raised umbrella, in pursuit of a stag; a man drawing a cannon; small figures of hares and birds. Between the figures the white ground is covered with fern leaf and floral diapering in "Tattooed" technique.

This vase is one of a pair found in Mexico at different times and in separated sections, the other example being owned by the Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia.

8. Maiolica Laver
1700-1750
Decorated in Dark Blue

10. Maiolica Flower Pot
1650-1700
Decorated in Dark Blue

11. Maiolica Vase
About 1660
Decorated in Dark and Light Blue

In front is a potter's mark, "he," which may be the mark of Damian Hernandez, one of the inspectors of the Potters' Guild in Puebla in 1653.

Showing Chinese influence in the figures of Chinamen and Spanish influence in bull fighter and hares.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1660. PLATE VII

12. BOWL

Diameter, 12⅜ inches.

Outer decoration consisting of eight leaf-shaped medallions reserved in white, each enclosing a conventionalized floral design in blue, the medallions separated by a ground of heavy dark blue enamel, containing white ornaments.

Showing Chinese influence.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1700. PLATE VIII

13. VASE (Jar Shape)

Height, 11½ inches.

Painted in dark blue, with four panels in pillar-shaped frames and enclosing rude bird and floral designs.

Showing Chinese influence.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1700. PLATE IX

14. JAR

Height, 13½ inches.

Inverted pear shape, having an iron lid and lock. Decorated with four large heart- and

ball-shaped medallions in heavy dark blue enamel, with reserved white spaces containing blue conventional flowers.

Chinese style.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1700. PLATE X

15. PLATE

Diameter, 16¼ inches.

Decoration in heavy dark blue enamel. The cavetto is covered with a large boldly painted star-shaped design, consisting of eight leaf-shaped, radiating segments in white, each containing a conventionalized floral ornament. In the centre an eight-petaled flower, superimposed in thick blue enamel. Around the slope a graceful, waving vine-leaf design. The radiating effect is carried out on the marly by eight broad, pointed spaces reserved in white containing a floral ornament in blue. Scalloped edge.

Showing Chinese influence.

Puebla, Mexico, 1700–1750. PLATE XI

16. ALBARELLO

Height, 10¼ inches.

In front a large oval medallion bordered with a bold floral wreath in grayish blue with yellow flowers.

Showing Spanish influence in form.

Puebla, Mexico, 1800–1830. PLATE XII

Plate VIII

12. Majolica Bowl
About 1700
Decorated in Dark Blue

13. Maiolica Jar
About 1700
Decorated in Dark Blue

14. Maiolica Jar with Iron Lid
About 1700
Decorated in Dark Blue

15. Maiolica Plate
1700-1750
Decorated in Dark Blue

17. SALT CELLAR

Height, 2¾ inches.

Cylindrical form, spreading out into a skirt at the base. Standing on three scroll feet. Painted with band of conventional pattern in red, green, and black.

Mexican style.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1830. PLATE XII

18. TILE

Dimensions, 5¼ x 5¼ inches.

Slightly convex surface, beveled edges, for use either on a plain or curved surface. Painted with figure of a pilgrim in dark blue. A large flowering plant at each side, over which are three-pointed ornaments. At lower edge is the letter F, the mark of the decorator.

Spanish style.

Puebla, Mexico, 1650–1680. PLATE XIII

19. TILE

Similar to preceding in size and style.

Central design of a man holding in his left hand a rabbit by its hind legs, in his right hand a hat. At the upper right corner the figure of a bee, which occurs on many of these tiles and is supposed to be the mark of the decorator.

Spanish style.

Puebla, Mexico, 1650–1680. PLATE XIII

20. TILE

Similar in size and style to preceding.

Central design of a man clothed in a short skirt with flowing sleeves, carrying in his right hand a baton or stick.

Spanish style.

Puebla, Mexico, 1650–1680. PLATE XIII

21. TILE

Dimensions, 5 x 5 inches.

Decorated in dark blue in "Tattooed" style with figure of young girl. Fern ornaments at sides.

Showing Spanish influence.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1700. PLATE XIV

22. TILE

Similar in size and style to preceding.

Figure of man in short skirt and cloak, surrounded by leafage.

Showing Spanish influence.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1700. PLATE XIV

23. TILE

Similar in size and style to preceding.

Parrot, surrounded by leafage.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1700. PLATE XIV

Mexican Maiolica
16. Albarello, 1800-1830
17. Salt Cellar, about 1830
Decorated in Colors

18, 19, 20. Maiolica Tiles
1650-1680
Decorated in Blue

23, 21, 22. Maiolica Tiles
About 1700
Decorated in Dark Blue

28. Maiolica Tile
Decadent Period, about 1800
Decorated in Polychrome

29. MAIOLICA TILE PANEL
About 1780
Decorated in Dark Blue and Purple

24. TILE

Dimensions, 4¾ x 4¾ inches.

Decorated in very thick dark blue enamel, which stands out in relief, with rude figure of stork, with scrolled ornaments at the corners.

Spanish style.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1700.

25. TILE

Dimensions, 5 x 5 inches.

Beveled and curved. Decoration of hare and rude ornaments reserved in the white ground, surrounded by heavy deep blue enamel which has been painted unevenly with a brush.

Spanish style.

Puebla, Mexico, 1650–1680.

26. TILE

Dimensions, 4¾ x 4¾ inches.

Rudely decorated with reserved white floral design with four petals, surrounded by dark blue ground. Blue dashed edges.

Spanish style.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1700.

27. TILE

Dimensions, 5 x 5 inches.

Decorated with pale blue outline of head of a man with frilled collar, accentuated with

dots and dashes of raised dark blue, surrounded by heavy blue vine leaves.

Showing Aztec influence.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1700.

28. TILE

Dimensions, 7¾ x 7¾ inches.

Head of man painted in black on the white ground, with cape of feather-work in yellow and reddish brown. Green edges at sides.

Spanish style.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1800. PLATE XV

29. PANEL

Height, 13 inches. Width, 10 inches.

Formed by six tiles. Figure of a saint, seated, with legs crossed, painted in purple, surrounded by a dark blue ground containing a dragon fly, bird and scrolled ornaments reserved in white.

Pisano style, showing Seville influence.

Puebla, Mexico, about 1780. PLATE XVI

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